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The implementation of multilingualism at the SEE University: a model for the multicultural Balkans

We present and compare ways and alternatives for an improvement of the use of languages in Macedonia. This covers the time span starting from the Constitution of the year 1974, the Constitution of the year 1990, as well as the Constitution which came out of the Ohrid Agreement in the year 2001. We present some concrete examples of the use of Albanian as well as the languages of the other nationalities. We focus on, and analyze particularly, the content of the above-mentioned Constitutions, which seen closely, have many similarities but differences as well, especially those included in the Constitution of the year 1990. Then, after gaining independence, because of which the inter-ethnic relations between the ethnic Albanians and Macedonians entered a deep crisis, the Albanian language lost the status that it had enjoyed foreseen by the Constitution of the year 1974. After that, we analyze and discuss the current status of the language policy in Macedonia, especially in the time period after the year 2001, as well as the changes that were brought by the Ohrid Agreement, which recognized Albanian as an official language, as well as (with particular emphasis) on the implementation of multilingualism at the SEEU in Tetovo, Republic of Macedonia.

Key words: multilingualism; constitution; language status; The Ohrid Agreement; SEE University.



1. Introduction

Language prejudices and confrontations existed since former Yugoslavia was established. These language confrontations take place in different fields, including the cultural, economical, educational fields of society. This “war” of languages is always an internal issue of the country, from which serious conflicts arise. But, on the other hand, multilingualism is expressed as a real obstacle to nationalism, as well as to occurrences of ethnocentrism, xenophobia and racism, and as a real factor to stimulate language tolerance. Little hope enabled the reforms that were made in 1974, where the Albanian language got somewhat a more advanced status. It was even used in the Parliament and other institutions of the Republic of Macedonia. But, after the protests of the Albanian community against the Yugoslav (Serbian) politics in 1981 in Kosovo, the situation got worse not only in Kosovo but in Macedonia as well. The Macedonian government was neglecting the Albanian language and limiting it from all different state institution. Furthermore, during the 1980s it was even dangerous to speak Albanian in the streets.

With the 8th September 1991 referendum which was boycotted by the Albanian community, ethnic Macedonian political elites decided to constitute the Republic of Macedonia as an independent, sovereign country, based on ethnocentrism and not on the multicultural and multiethnic reality. The Albanians boycotted the referendum and the Constitution due to the fact that they were excluded from state formation status and due to the fact that the new Macedonian political elites continued with language discrimination policies that were launched in 1981.

It was exactly the treatment and the position of the Albanian language that was one of the reasons that led to the violent riots in 2001, besides the overall position of the Albanians in Macedonia. By then the Albanian language had a limited use as an official language only in the municipalities where the Albanians had some kind of local government, somewhat effective, which was enabled by the votes. In the other part of the country, including big cities inhabited by Albanians, as Skopje and Kumanovo, the Albanian language was not allowed to be used as an official language, creating a conflictual attitude of the citizens against the country.

After the conflict, Macedonia as a multi-ethnic and multicultural country accepted the dialogue between the two biggest nationalities and on the 13th of



August, 2001 the Ohrid Agreement was signed, which ended the clashes and it specifically focused on the official position of the Albanian language. Although, for the Macedonians it was loss of pride for the Albanian language to be mentioned as an official language, the mediators from abroad invented a King Solomon's solution by which the official language is the language spoken by at least 20 percent of the citizens at the central and municipality level in Macedonia (*Ohrid Framework Agreement signed in 2001*), avoiding the direct mentioning of the Albanian language. Aware of their number, the Albanian side agreed.

The Albanians in the Republic of Macedonia after the official registration of the citizens in 2002, make 25.17 percent of the 2 million citizens in the country. Having in mind that Albanian traditionally practice their language in informal settings this implies that a quarter of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia speak the Albanian language. Moreover, the status of the second official language itself was left to be made precise by law. The agreement referred only to the general situation. The Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, in the parliamentary session held on November 16, 2001 adopted the 5th Amendment which implied changes in the Constitution, especially in article 7 of the Constitution which was regulating the issue of official languages in the Republic of Macedonia.

Furthermore, seven years had to pass until the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia approved the law on languages. During these years (2001–2008) the use of the Albanian language was allowed only in the segments which were specified in the agreement, but sometimes not even allowing these or manipulating them.

Without the law, the Albanian language tried to create its space, the Albanian lawmakers spoke in their native language, but they could not lead commissions in Albanian. The local government organs where the Albanians are the majority used their own language as an official language, but the use of Albanian was unclear and confusing in the units of the government, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) or the courts. The Albanian police officers were the first who had the courage to address the citizen in their native language, but even they did not use Albanian in the official written reports. In addition, personal documents were issued in specific form for the Albanians. The personal data were written in the Macedonian and Albanian language. This practice at least broke with the practice of deforming the Albanian names when written in Macedonian in official documents.



After this, the situation improved slightly but it did not become fully acceptable for the Albanian community. Let us discuss now the real situation of the Albanian language use on the basis of specific examples, interpretations, comparison and specific analyses taking the paragraphs of the law into account.

Based on the fifth Amendment, the first paragraph states: *“In the territory of the Republic of Macedonia and in its international relations, the Macedonian language with its Cyrillic alphabet is the official language.”* In this way Macedonian became the official, dominant language of the Republic of Macedonia, whereas Albanian is an official language without a general status because it represents the language of the non-majority community that is spoken by 20 percent of citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. This approach to democracy makes the use and learning of Albanian as a common official language almost impossible, because it is clear that one language is more favoured, and together with this its culture and history. This paragraph of article 7 completed by the 5th Amendment is totally respected by the Albanians and the other nationalities. They learn, know and use the Macedonian language and its Cyrillic alphabet in all cases. This is however not the case with the Macedonians that live in the municipalities dominated by the Albanians. These Macedonians are not obliged to learn and use the Albanian language and its Latin alphabet. Hence, the Albanian language remains a foreign language for the Macedonians.

In some cases, in the municipalities where the 20 percent is reached, even after ten years after the constitutional changes there are problems with the implementation of the law. The most vivid example is the municipality of Krushevo. Here are more than 20 percent Albanians who still do not have the right to use Albanian, which is granted by the Constitution due to the lack of political will of Macedonian political elites who govern the municipalities. In Dollnen and Caska municipality even though there are more than 20 percent Albanians, Albanian is only used partly. In none of these municipalities is there a translation service, no bilingual inscriptions are used, either in the local traffic, street and village names, historical or touristic objects, private firms or municipality institutions. For an ordinary citizen it is not clear whether the obstacle is a financial issue, knowing the language of the nationality, the municipality's neglect or by purposed obstructions. Hence it is impossible to put the Ohrid agreement into practice in everyday life in municipalities where the Albanians are the minority but above 20 percent.



2. Educational problems in Macedonia

A problem arises with the learning of the Macedonian language by the Albanian children at the first grade in primary school. This is a very sensitive issue. We think that the Ministry of Education has brought some precipitated decisions to the learning of Macedonian at the first grade by Albanian pupils. The absurdity of their decision lies in the fact that the Ministry has not done any study or scientific analysis either on the socio-linguistic or on the pedagogical or psychological aspects. The learning of the Macedonian language by the Albanian children should be analysed in various. The language political aspect should be viewed from the national and social context, the linguistic element should be appropriate to the student's psycho-physical forces, the psycho-linguistic and socio-linguistic aspect interferes with the age and the brain development of the children and the typology of the second language is completely different from the native language.

When it is tried to create a multilingual situation in a societal context, this requires the study of the language status and to check whether the official decision is right. It should be taken into consideration that the Macedonian language is neither a native language, nor a foreign language, but it is the official language. If we observe and analyze carefully the typology of the German scholar Kloss (1967), it turns out that Macedonia is not a mono-ethnic but it is a multi-ethnic society, because the Macedonians themselves do not form the only ethnic group in the country. Inside the political borders of Macedonia live many other ethnic communities that are recognized by the new constitution. So besides Macedonians (64.18%) and Albanians (25.17%) there are Turks (3.85%), Serbians (1.78%), Bosnians (0.84%), Roma's (2.66%) and Vlachs (0.48%) (Compare Census 2002, State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia). The requirement of the Ministry of Education that Albanians should learn Macedonian from the first grade doesn't stand because Albanian too is a recognized language in society. Because of that the learning of Macedonian should be viewed from three aspects, including the pedagogical, psychological and linguistic aspect. Having in mind the pedagogical aspect it is very clear that the Ministry has not seriously studied the issue. In our view, all the schools' documents should be studied such as texts, curricula, cadre books and didactic tools. The educators agree that the learning of a second language should start when the formation of the native language is done. In our case in Macedonia the learning of the second Macedonian language for Albanians, and Albanian for Macedonians, would be fully efficient in learning, starting from the fourth or fifth grade, as the commu-



nity languages are learned in Switzerland and in some other countries with a developed democracy. The learning of the Macedonian language by the Albanian pupils shall not start from elementary level because they are in touch with this language in the environment where they live, like in the streets, in the supermarkets and everywhere. The grammatical and lexical forms are clear and the Albanian pupils are able to understand that Macedonian is different from their mother tongue. So, the two and a half years would be superfluous to them; they would not be motivated because the learning could cause aversion and banality; they would lose interest because the pupils know most of the words that they are supposed to learn in school and the other words are understood because they encounter them in their everyday life. Hence, it is important to take into account the environmental factor (Ibrahimi 2005).

If we want to succeed in acquiring the Macedonian language as a second language it is not enough that the pupils are familiar with only the track systems. According to modern linguistics, for acquiring a second or foreign language, learning Macedonian from the first grade by non-Macedonian speakers as it is required by the Ministry of Education interferes with all the principles and norms of the educational and learning-teaching systems (Trudgill and Cheshire 1998). Modern linguistics emphasises that the main issue of learning the second or third language is not learning the words, because acquiring too much vocabulary creates problems in learning hampering the progress in class.

From all we argued above it becomes clear that the Macedonian language is neither a mother tongue nor a foreign language, it is a language of society as Albanian should be in Macedonia. By learning this language from the first grade, the Albanian learners in Macedonia are burdened with learning four language codes: local Albanian, standard Albanian, the foreign language and the language of the community. But, even if this had a scientific backup, which is clearly shown that it has not Macedonian cannot be learned from the first grade. There are no texts differentiated by the environment. However, there is a cadre in teaching the language because it is known that to learn the language of the environment there are other didactic rules which are different from the ones for learning a foreign language. The forceful imposing can result in aversion. Little children are unable to learn it from the first grade under these conditions.

Planning and care is especially important for guaranteeing the main dispositions of the Ohrid agreement. Educational standards must be the same for all pupils. Based on the declarations of the United Nations discriminating students is



not allowed. It seems that the Albanian issue in Macedonia looks like the '80s of the last century, when the rights were written on paper but they never functioned. Albanians experienced this situation, already. There are still fresh memories of the sufferings when Albanians were forbidden to communicate in Albanian, when administration and evidence had to be written in Macedonian, when it was required that the native Albanian language should be learned only as a school subject and when classes were mixed up obligatorily.

3. South East European University as an agent for multilingualism in the Republic of Macedonia

Europe is a multilingual continent. There are practically no mono-national countries. Sometimes Island and Portugal are mentioned, but even those are mentioned with great reserve. As far as individual speakers are concerned, the majority of citizens in the biggest part of the world are bi-/multilingual (Trudgill and Cheshire 1998).

The Dutch sociologist Abram de Swaan was the first one to make some effort to put order in the language chaos. In his book, he developed the concept of a "world" or "global" language system (De Swaan 2001) According to him, languages are part of worldwide system. Each language includes groups of local languages connected to a central language, usually to the language which is spoken by the majority of bilingual speakers (French, German, Russian, Spanish, Chinese and Arabic). English too has its constellation, but now it creates a global network which ensures communication among constellations.

A good example for the management of multilingualism is Europe, which has special procedures resolving the issue of languages. Europeans live in multilingual countries and have to raise their children in the diversity of languages.

Macedonia as a multi-ethnic and multicultural country accepted the dialogue between the two major nationalities, and as a result in the spring of 2000 the High Commissioner of OSCE for national minorities, Max van der Stoep started discussion on founding a new university in the Republic of Macedonia. After the implementation of the higher education law by the Parliament of Macedonia which allowed the creation of universities by founders that have no link to the country the international donors could support the education in Albanian at the academic level. The planning of the "Albanian" university started at the end of



2000. The building started in March 2001 and the South-East European University (SEEU) was opened six months later.

In November 2002, the student number reached 2250, while in October 2003, the total number of students was 3700. *SEEU* is now in *its tenth year of operation* and it has more than 7000 students and 3000 graduates. From its inception in 2001, the SEEU has succeeded in establishing itself as a qualitative financially stable university and is regarded as a model for multi-ethnic and multi-lingual higher education in South East Europe.

Another new model is based on the “dominant language constellations” which enables the citizens to function as a unity in the multi-ethnic areas. This model consists of three parts at least: usually a language for broader communication (more often English), an official or regional language, an ethnic language and minority languages. Unfortunately, this regime could not be created in Macedonia in general, which should have offered its citizens three languages, English, Macedonian and Albanian.

However, it was exactly this idea of using three languages in education that made possible the opening of SEEU in Tetovo. This is three language model that is expressed in the logo of the university, lectures and diplomas, in all the writings and documents on the website of the university. The three language model was supported by the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications and the Language Centre. Within the faculty also the departments of English, German, French, Albanian and Macedonian were opened. It is important to mention that in these departments there were exchange programs for teachers from the related countries, and often those have been famous scholars, who have been of great help during their stay at the SEE University.

The idea that the students from the very beginning get to know the neighbouring languages is the basic practice of the last nine years and is a valuable concept for peaceful co-existence. This practice not only matches the university policy as a private, multicultural institution, but it also appeared to be a very productive concept for Macedonia itself. The disadvantage of this program is the duration, because the learning of each-others languages is operative only for two semesters, involving only two levels A1 and A2. English is studied during all the studies and on all levels. The application of the three languages at SEEU for nine years has given encouraging results, though. The formation of the Centre of Training and Certification of Albanian and Macedonian Language (QETEC) is



still bearing fruits. This project was analysed according to the standards of the Common European framework in accordance with the ALTE program assigned by the European Union in 2001 (Alderson 1991). Passing this exam allows the students to get an important document which confirms the level of the language knowledge officially. The manner and criteria of the test are described in the special job policy, implemented by the Scientific, Academic Council of the Faculty of Languages, Cultures, and Communications at SEE University. With this program the knowledge of languages in general is foreseen, including four language skills: listening (understanding of spoken text), reading (understanding of written texts), writing and speaking at six levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. The centre is supplied with the appropriate literature which the candidates use for testing the three language levels.

4. Conclusion

It seems that in the Europe of tomorrow the common language will be that of the national institutions. However, this does not have to mean that a single language will fulfil all the functions. Using a common European language for instance English would have decreased the tensions in Macedonia. Besides English, the nationalities, Macedonians and Albanians can use their own language.

The only solution that would be acceptable for everyone is that the nationalities can use their own language and that they should be motivated to learn each other's language, which will enable the citizens to function as a unity in a multicultural environment. This model includes at least three parts: a language for broader communication (more often English), and two regional or official languages. In other words, this means that the more Macedonians learn Albanian, and vice versa, the more understanding there would be.

In order to realize this, the three languages model should be implemented from the primary school to university (the SEEU example) where the pupils will study in the mother tongue but they will have to study the language of others (Macedonians the Albanian language and Albanians the Macedonian language) from the fourth grade. For this goal we can use mass media and learning languages from the TV (Ibrahimi 2005). In this way, we would complete the concept of a united Europe, and as a result we would have an increased number of polyglots. Such a development should be followed in the Balkans, specifically, in Macedonia, where Albanian has to find its place in the educational process for



Macedonians, Turks and others, starting from primary education. That is the intention of multiculturalism, to unite all cultures, but enabling each culture to keep its characteristics, because different cultures exist and exist in the heart of Europe as a common treasure.

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PROVOĐENJE VIŠEJEZIČNOSTI NA SVEUČILIŠTU JUGOISTOČNE EUROPE: MODEL ZA MULTIKULTURALNI BALKAN

U radu predstavljamo i uspoređujemo alternative za unapređenje jezične uporabe u Makedoniji. Obuhvaćeno je vremensko razdoblje od Ustava iz 1974., Ustava iz 1990. i Ustava koji je proistekao iz Ohridskog sporazuma 2001. Opisujemo nekoliko konkretnih primjera korištenja albanskog jezika i jezika drugih nacija. U fokusu istraživanja i predmet analize je sadržaj gore navedenih ustava, koji imaju puno sličnosti, ali i razlika, posebice u Ustavu iz 1990. Nakon dobivanja neovisnosti, zbog koje su međuetnički odnosi između Albanaca i Makedonaca zapali u duboku krizu, albanski je jezik izgubio status koji je imao prema Ustavu iz 1974. Nakon toga analizira se i raspravlja trenutna jezična politika u Makedoniji, posebice u razdoblju nakon 2001., kao i promjene koje su uvedene Ohridskim sporazumom, kojim je albanski priznat kao službeni jezik, s posebnim naglaskom na provedbu višejezičnosti na Sveučilištu jugoistočne Europe u Tetovu, Republika Makedonija.

Ključne riječi: višejezičnost; ustav; status jezika; Ohridski sporazum; Sveučilište jugoistočne Europe.